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ANSWERS

TO SOME
COMMON
QUESTIONS
ABOUT

ADOPTION

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STATE OF
ILLINOIS

DEPARTMENT OF
CHILDREN AND FAMILY
SERVICES

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INTRODUCTION

Your decision to adopt a child will be one of the most important you ever make. The decision to have a child—whether by birth or adoption—is one you will live with the rest of your life. The responsibilities of being a parent are awesome and mean a new life for you and the child.

However, the Department's primary adoption goal is not to find a child for a family but, rather, to find just the right family to meet the particular needs of each of our adoptable children.

With that focus in mind, we hope the following information will help you make the important decision about whether to open your home to a child (or children) who needs permanency and a chance to benefit from the unique qualities your family has to offer.

What requirements do people have to meet in order to adopt?

This is the most common question we hear. Many agencies have changed their requirements frequently in the last few years, and this has added to the confusion. Our agency does not have a list of specific requirements; a person who is interested in adopting one of the waiting children and who can give a child loving care is eligible to adopt. This means:

- Single, married, and divorced people can adopt.
- People with—and without—children of their own can adopt.
- You can adopt several children.
- Working mothers can adopt.
- People in their fifties can adopt school-age children, and interested people in their sixties will be considered for teenagers.
- We have no specific income requirement. There is even a program available to help families with expenses when they adopt a child with special needs.
- You must have room for another child, but you don't have to own a home.

How much does it cost to adopt?

Our agency charges nothing. You pay only the lawyer's fee and for the care of your new child. As we mentioned, some financial assistance may be available to meet the extra expenses of certain children.

What happens after we fill out an application?

You will be asked to complete the licensing process, which includes a background check, a medical exam, and a visit to your home by a worker. We'll also have several group and/or individual opportunities to share information. The agency will give you as many "tools" as possible to help prepare you for adoptive parenthood. The social worker will want to get to know you well so a good "match" can be made between a child's special needs and your family's special strengths. Together you and the social worker will decide whether there is a waiting child who could benefit from becoming a part of your family.

How long does it take?

If you are interested in a waiting child, the time it takes us to get to know you will vary. Two months, on the average, should be adequate to determine what kind of child is best for you. Then, how soon you get a child depends on the age of the youngster you want and what problems you can handle.

When do we get to meet the children?

Once you are ready for a child to be placed with you, we will call you when we learn of a child you might be interested in who needs a home. We will tell you about the child and you can even see a photograph of the child.

We'll tell you about the child's background, his personality, and his problems. Then, we'll ask you to decide whether you are seriously interested in him before you meet him. If you think this sounds like the child for you, we'll arrange for you to meet him, perhaps casually at first. Once you are sure you wish to proceed with adoption, we will begin pre-placement visits. These visits give you a chance to get to know each other. They go on for as long as they are needed, from a week to several months. Then comes the great day when your new child comes to stay.

We keep hearing about “the waiting children.” Who are they?

Waiting children are the reason we’re seeking adoptive families. They are siblings who need to be placed together, white children over age 11, black children over three years, and children with physical and developmental disabilities. Boys outnumber girls. The children are black, white, racially mixed, Hispanic and other races. Another term for them is “special needs” children.

Where are these children? Can we see them?

Most children waiting to be adopted are living in foster homes. Some will be adopted by their foster parents, while others need new families. A few are in children’s institutions. Since the children who could be placed with you are scattered all over the state, there is no way you can personally meet a group of them. But we do have a listing book with pictures and descriptions of many of Illinois’ waiting children. You are welcome to look through the book to get a better idea of who these youngsters are. We can’t promise you a specific child from the book because another home may be ready before yours. But once you’re prepared for adoption, if the child who caught your eye is still waiting and we all agree that yours would be a good home for him, we will make inquiries about him for you.

If the children are in foster homes now, won’t it be hard for them to move to a new adoptive home?

Yes, it will. It is always hard on a child to leave a place that has been home to him. Careful work must be done with the child to prepare him for the move and to be sure he understands that he is not being moved because he was bad. While pre-placement visits will help, it is reasonable to expect that your new child will have some special problems until he gets adjusted. There may be nightmares, crying spells, babyish behavior, or defiance and disobedience. We will try to help you understand some of the reasons for these problems before you encounter them, and we can talk about what to do about them. Your love, attention, patience and understanding will help the child pass through this problem period as quickly as possible. We strongly believe the benefits of a permanent home will soon outweigh the temporary problems.

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Can we adopt more than one child?

Yes, indeed! There are many brothers and sisters waiting to be adopted. We especially welcome families able to take three or more children at once. You are also welcome to re-apply after one adoption is completed for another child to add to your family. We have many families who have come back several times.

Keep in mind that we may decide not to place a child with you who is too close to the age of any child you already have. Adjusting is easier for all children involved if their ages and needs are different enough that you can satisfy each without taking away from the other. There will be some competition between the children anyway; if they're too close in age, adjusting can be difficult.

If we have problems after we get the child, will the agency help us?

We will give you all the help we can. During the waiting period of at least six months before you go to court to finalize the adoption, we will have regular visits with you and will be on call to help with problems that come up. You should call us right away rather than wait until a problem really gets you down. Even after the child is legally a part of your family, we may be able to help you find whatever services you need, such as tutoring, speech therapy, or help with a medical problem.

What if we meet a child, have a few visits with him, and then decide he just isn't the one for us?

That is one of the purposes of the "get acquainted" period. We want you to be sure this is a child you can love and care for. If you feel it just won't work, then we won't place the child with you. To do so would be even more hurtful to you and the child. We will talk some more about what went wrong and try to get a better idea of the right kind of child for your family. You may have to wait a while until the kind of child you really want needs a home.

Can we get a child who doesn't have problems?

None of our children is as "problem-free" as a child who has never had to leave his natural family and live in foster homes. The kinds and degrees of problems will vary, but it is a safe bet that all our children will have some difficulty trusting new parents and will have some doubts about their own worth. Some children react by trying to prove how bad they can be to see if you mean what you say about loving them and being a family forever. Others, sure they won't succeed, give up trying and do poorly at school and with friends. Your family is the chance these children need to regain their self-confidence and to dare to return love.

Why did these children have to leave their parents in the first place?

There are almost as many reasons as there are children. Some children are given up for adoption because their parents are convinced they cannot adequately care for them. Other children come to us through the courts because they have been abused or neglected by their parents. Still other children come into foster care for what is thought to be a temporary stay while their parents try to straighten out problems caused by illness, emotional problems, financial difficulties or immaturity. In some instances, the families cannot be reunited, and we must look for new permanent homes for the children.

Why have some children had to wait so long for adoptive homes?

There are several reasons. For some, there were no adoptive homes available when the children first came to us, so they were placed with foster families. When things were going smoothly, the foster family didn't think of adopting and the agency didn't want to upset the child by moving him.

Others were not legally free for adoption. The process of terminating both parents' legal rights is very thorough, sometimes complicated and lengthy. However, recent changes in the state's adoption law make it simpler to free children for adoption and prevent them from spending needless years in foster care. The new adoption law also created the Adopt-

tion Information Center of Illinois with a toll-free hotline (1-800-572-2390). Interested citizens may call to find out more about the kinds of children who are waiting for adoption statewide.

Does it cause problems if we adopt a child who remembers his parents?

It is certainly a different situation from adopting an infant who has never known any other parents. It means we must work with the child to prepare him for adoption, making sure he understands why he can't return to his own parents. He needs to know that, at least in some cases, his parents gave him up for adoption not because they didn't love him but because they did. They wanted him to have a warm, secure family that they couldn't give him. That kind of preparation is our job. Then you take over and help him adjust by talking freely with him about other places he has lived and by respecting his need to think well of his previous parents and foster parents. Sometimes older children do keep in touch with various relatives or former foster parents. This does not mean the child does not care about his adoptive family. He simply also continues to care about other important people in his life.

Do a child's natural parents ever try to get him back?

This is a common concern of adoptive parents. Recent, highly publicized court battles for children have made everyone realize how important it is that all legal procedures have been completed before adopting. One advantage of adopting through a licensed agency is that you can be confident every legal safeguard has been taken to protect you and your adopted child.

What if we adopt a child and when he's older he wants to find his original parents?

Most adopted people are curious about their original family. This shows up particularly during adolescence, when young people are trying to sort out who they are. Often we can give you enough information about your child's original family to satisfy his curiosity. It is not always easy for an adopted person to find out much about his past. If

your child feels he must try, it's best if you relax and help him in any way you can. Keep in mind that his curiosity is normal and does not mean that he wants to return to his original family. He'll love you all the more if you can understand his need to know about his early life.

If I need help with my child after the adoption is finalized can the agency help me?

The Department of Children and Family Services provides a variety of services to children and families. Adoptive families may need those services. After the adoption is finalized you may wish to contact an adoption worker for particular services related to the adoption.

How can I get more information on adoption?

Call your nearest office of the Department of Children and Family Services or call the Adoption Information Center of Illinois at 1-800-572-2390.

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